

Office Space

By Officer Tyler Longman

Working on the highways and roadways is a frequent and unavoidable circumstance that police officers find themselves in each day. Whether it is conducting a traffic stop or responding to an accident; emergency personnel are put in the dangerous situation of working alongside moving traffic. In 2005 the legislature amended the traffic code and implemented 41-6a-904, commonly referred to as the "Move Over Law", in an attempt to reduce the number of accidents involving emergency vehicles. The law states that when an emergency vehicle is stopped in the roadway with its emergency lights activated, all approaching motorists will reduce speed and give as much room as safely possible. The law also states that if it is safe to do so, motorists in the closest lane to the emergency vehicle will change lanes moving away from the emergency vehicle.

This year has been a particularly dangerous year for police officers working on the roadway. The Utah Highway Patrol has had 12 accidents in the last two months involving police vehicles stopped on the side of the road with emergency lights activated. Drivers did not comply with the move over law, resulting in an avoidable collision. Due to the number of accidents and the danger to emergency personnel, the legislature is currently working on a bill that would stiffen the penalties for failing to comply with the move over law.

I was asked to address this issue, as there may be some confusion regarding this law and what actions a motorists is required to take when approaching a stopped emergency vehicle with its lights flashing. If you find yourself approaching an emergency vehicle that is stopped on the roadway in your direction of travel, and its emergency lights are flashing; you should first reduce your speed. The law does not give a specific number, so you will have to use good judgment. You need to reduce your speed enough that it is noticeable to officers in the area; however, do not cause an accident by jamming on your brakes. I suggest gradually reducing your speed as you approach by 10 to 15 mph. Reducing your speed in this manner will help by safely slowing traffic behind you as well. As you are slowing, look to see if the next lane away from the emergency vehicle is open. If you can safely change lanes away from the emergency vehicle, then do so. This will create a greater safety zone for those who are working in the roadway. If it is not safe to make a lane change, move as far over in your lane as safely possible and be attentive as you pass at this significantly reduced speed. Remember the goal here is the safety of other motorists as well as those working on the side of the road.

Of course seeing the emergency vehicle(s) ahead is a key factor in being able to respond properly to the situation. Being a responsible driver means keeping your attention on the task of driving. Keep your eyes scanning ahead and allow yourself enough room behind the vehicle

in front of you to react to approaching hazards. For many people, a day at the office is spent in large part on the side of the road. Be courteous and allow those workers some office space as you travel on the roadway.